

Senate Bill No. 1982

Passed the Senate May 2, 1996

Secretary of the Senate

Passed the Assembly June 13, 1996

Chief Clerk of the Assembly

This bill was received by the Governor this ____ day
of _____, 1996, at ____ o'clock __M.

Private Secretary of the Governor

└

CHAPTER ____

An act to amend Section 361.5 of the Welfare and Institutions Code, relating to children.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

SB 1982, Russell. Children: family reunification.

(1) Existing law requires that, whenever a minor is removed from a parent's or guardian's custody, the juvenile court order the probation officer to provide child welfare services to the minor and the minor's parents or guardians for the purpose of facilitating reunification of the family, as provided. Under these provisions, reunification services need not be provided when the court finds, by clear and convincing evidence, that specified circumstances exist.

This bill additionally would provide that reunification services need not be provided when the court finds, by clear and convincing evidence, that the minor meets one of several specified criteria, that the parent or guardian willfully abandoned the minor, and the court finds that the abandonment constituted a serious danger to the child. The bill would also make a conforming change.

(2) Existing law provides that in specified circumstances in which the court need not provide reunification services, the court shall not order reunification services unless it finds that those services are likely to prevent reabuse or continued neglect of the child or that failure to try reunification will be detrimental to the child, as provided.

This bill would specify that this finding shall include within the specified circumstances, the circumstance specified in (1).

The people of the State of California do enact as follows:

SECTION 1. Section 361.5 of the Welfare and Institutions Code is amended to read:



361.5. (a) Except as provided in subdivision (b) or upon the establishment of an order of guardianship pursuant to Section 360, whenever a minor is removed from a parent's or guardian's custody, the juvenile court shall order the probation officer to provide child welfare services to the minor and the minor's parents or guardians for the purpose of facilitating reunification of the family within a maximum time period not to exceed 12 months. The court also shall make findings pursuant to subdivision (a) of Section 366. When counseling or other treatment services are ordered, the parent or guardian shall be ordered to participate in those services, unless the parent's or guardian's participation is deemed by the court to be inappropriate or potentially detrimental to the child. Services may be extended up to an additional six months if it can be shown that the objectives of the service plan can be achieved within the extended time period. Physical custody of the minor by the parents or guardians during the 18-month period shall not serve to interrupt the running of the period. If at the end of the 18-month period, a child cannot be safely returned to the care and custody of a parent or guardian without court supervision, but the child clearly desires contact with the parent or guardian, the court shall take the child's desire into account in devising a permanency plan.

Except in cases where, pursuant to subdivision (b), the court does not order reunification services, the court shall inform the parent or parents of Section 366.25 or 366.26 and shall specify that the parent's or parents' parental rights may be terminated.

(b) Reunification services need not be provided to a parent or guardian described in this subdivision when the court finds, by clear and convincing evidence, any of the following:

(1) That the whereabouts of the parent or guardian is unknown. A finding pursuant to this paragraph shall be supported by an affidavit or by proof that a reasonably diligent search has failed to locate the parent or guardian. The posting or publication of notices is not required in that search.



(2) That the parent or guardian is suffering from a mental disability that is described in Chapter 2 (commencing with Section 7820) of Part 4 of Division 12 of the Family Code and that renders him or her incapable of utilizing those services.

(3) That the minor had been previously adjudicated a dependent pursuant to any subdivision of Section 300 as a result of physical or sexual abuse, that following that adjudication the minor had been removed from the custody of his or her parent or guardian pursuant to Section 361, that the minor has been returned to the custody of the parent or parents or guardian or guardians from whom the minor had been taken originally, and that the minor is being removed pursuant to Section 361, due to additional physical or sexual abuse. However, this section is not applicable if the jurisdiction of the juvenile court has been dismissed prior to the additional abuse.

(4) That the parent or guardian of the minor has been convicted of causing the death of another child through abuse or neglect.

(5) That the minor was brought within the jurisdiction of the court under subdivision (e) of Section 300 because of the conduct of that parent or guardian.

(6) That the minor has been adjudicated a dependent pursuant to any subdivision of Section 300 as a result of severe sexual abuse or the infliction of severe physical harm by a parent or guardian, as defined in this subdivision, and the court makes a factual finding that it would not benefit the child to pursue reunification services with the offending parent or guardian.

A finding of severe sexual abuse, for the purposes of this subdivision, may be based on, but is not limited to, sexual intercourse or stimulation involving genital-genital, oral-genital, anal-genital, or oral-anal contact, whether between the parent or guardian and the child, or between the child and another person or animal with the actual or implied consent of, and for the financial gain or other advantage of, the parent or guardian; or the penetration or manipulation of the child's genital organs or rectum by any animate or inanimate object, for the



sexual gratification of the parent or guardian, or for the sexual gratification of another person with the actual or implied consent of, and for the financial gain or other advantage of, the parent or guardian.

A finding of the infliction of severe physical harm, for the purposes of this subdivision, may be based on, but is not limited to, deliberate and serious injury inflicted to or on a child's body by an act or omission of the parent or guardian, or of another individual or animal with the consent of the parent or guardian; deliberate and torturous confinement of the child in a closed space; or any other torturous act or omission which would be reasonably understood to cause serious emotional damage.

(7) That the minor was conceived by means of the commission of an offense listed in Section 288 or 288.5 of the Penal Code, or by an act committed outside this state which if committed in this state would constitute such an offense. This paragraph only applies to the parent who perpetrated the offense or act.

(8) That the minor has been found to be a child described in subdivision (g) of Section 300, that the parent or guardian of the minor willfully abandoned the minor, and the court finds that the abandonment itself constituted a serious danger to the child. For the purposes of this paragraph, "serious danger" means that, without intervention by another person or agency, the minor would have sustained severe or permanent disability, injury, illness, or death.

(c) In deciding whether to order reunification in any case in which this section applies, the court shall hold a dispositional hearing. The probation officer shall prepare a report which discusses whether reunification services shall be provided. When it is alleged, pursuant to paragraph (2) of subdivision (b), that the parent is incapable of utilizing services due to mental disability, the court shall order reunification services unless competent evidence from mental health professionals establishes that, even with the provision of services, the



parent is unlikely to be capable of adequately caring for the child within 12 months.

When paragraph (3), (4), (5), or (8), inclusive, of subdivision (b) is applicable, the court shall not order reunification unless it finds that, based on competent testimony, those services are likely to prevent reabuse or continued neglect of the child or that failure to try reunification will be detrimental to the child because the child is closely and positively attached to that parent. The probation officer shall investigate the circumstances leading to the removal of the minor and advise the court whether there are circumstances which indicate that reunification is likely to be successful or unsuccessful and whether failure to order reunification is likely to be detrimental to the child.

The failure of the parent to respond to previous services, the fact that the child was abused while the parent was under the influence of drugs or alcohol, a past history of violent behavior, or testimony by a competent professional that the parent's behavior is unlikely to be changed by services are among the factors indicating that reunification services are unlikely to be successful. The fact that a parent or guardian is no longer living with an individual who severely abused the minor may be considered in deciding that reunification services are likely to be successful, provided that the court shall consider any pattern of behavior on the part of the parent that has exposed the child to repeated abuse.

The court shall not order reunification for a parent who perpetrated an offense or act specified in paragraph (7) of subdivision (b) unless the court finds, by clear and convincing evidence, that reunification is in the best interest of the minor.

(d) If reunification services are not ordered pursuant to paragraph (1) of subdivision (b) and the whereabouts of a parent become known within six months of the out-of-home placement of the minor, the court shall order the probation officer to provide family reunification services in accordance with this subdivision. However,



the time limits specified in subdivision (a) and Section 366.25 are not tolled by the parent's absence.

(e) (1) If the parent or guardian is incarcerated or institutionalized, the court shall order reasonable services unless the court determines, by clear and convincing evidence, those services would be detrimental to the minor. In determining detriment, the court shall consider the age of the child, the degree of parent-child bonding, the length of the sentence, the nature of the treatment, the nature of crime or illness, the degree of detriment to the child if services are not offered and, for minors 10 years of age or older, the minor's attitude toward the implementation of family reunification services, and any other appropriate factors. Reunification services are subject to the 18-month limitation imposed in subdivision (a). Services may include, but shall not be limited to, all of the following:

(A) Maintaining contact between parent and child through collect phone calls.

(B) Transportation services, where appropriate.

(C) Visitation services, where appropriate.

(D) Reasonable services to extended family members or foster parents providing care for the child if the services are not detrimental to the child.

An incarcerated parent may be required to attend counseling, parenting classes, or vocational training programs as part of the service plan if these programs are available.

(2) The presiding judge of the juvenile court of each county may convene representatives of the county welfare department, the sheriff's department, and other appropriate entities for the purpose of developing and entering into protocols for ensuring the notification, transportation, and presence of an incarcerated or institutionalized parent at all court hearings involving proceedings affecting the minor pursuant to Section 2625 of the Penal Code.

(3) Notwithstanding any other provision of law, if the incarcerated parent is a woman seeking to participate in the community treatment program operated by the



Department of Corrections pursuant to Chapter 4 (commencing with Section 3410) of Title 2 of Part 3 of the Penal Code, the court shall determine whether the parent's participation in a program is in the child's best interest and whether it is suitable to meet the needs of the parent and child.

(f) If a court, pursuant to paragraph (2), (3), (4), (5), (6), (7), or (8) of subdivision (b) or paragraph (1) of subdivision (e), does not order reunification services, it shall conduct a hearing pursuant to Section 366.25 or 366.26 within 120 days of the dispositional hearing. However, the court shall not schedule a hearing so long as the other parent is being provided reunification services pursuant to subdivision (a). The court may continue to permit the parent to visit the minor unless it finds that visitation would be detrimental to the minor.

(g) Whenever a court orders that a hearing shall be held pursuant to Section 366.25 or 366.26 it shall direct the agency supervising the child and the licensed county adoption agency, or the State Department of Social Services when it is acting as an adoption agency in counties which are not served by a county adoption agency, to prepare an assessment which shall include:

(1) Current search efforts for an absent parent or parents.

(2) A review of the amount of and nature of any contact between the minor and his or her parents since the time of placement.

(3) An evaluation of the minor's medical, developmental, scholastic, mental, and emotional status.

(4) A preliminary assessment of the eligibility and commitment of any identified prospective adoptive parent or guardian, particularly the caretaker, to include a social history including screening for criminal records and prior referrals for child abuse or neglect, the capability to meet the minor's needs, and the understanding of the legal and financial rights and responsibilities of adoption and guardianship.

(5) The relationship of the minor to any identified prospective adoptive parent or guardian, the duration



and character of the relationship, the motivation for seeking adoption or guardianship, and a statement from the minor concerning placement and the adoption or guardianship, unless the minor's age or physical, emotional, or other condition precludes his or her meaningful response, and if so, a description of the condition.

(6) An analysis of the likelihood that the minor will be adopted if parental rights are terminated.

(h) In determining whether reunification services will benefit the child pursuant to paragraph (6) of subdivision (b), the court shall consider any information it deems relevant, including the following factors:

(1) The specific act or omission comprising the severe sexual abuse or the severe physical harm inflicted on the child.

(2) The circumstances under which the abuse or harm was inflicted on the child.

(3) The severity of the emotional trauma suffered by the child.

(4) Any history of abuse of other children by the offending parent or guardian.

(5) The likelihood that the child may be safely returned to the care of the offending parent or guardian within 18 months with no continuing supervision.

(6) Whether or not the child desires to be reunified with the offending parent or guardian.

(i) The court shall read into the record the basis for a finding of severe sexual abuse or the infliction of severe physical harm under paragraph (6) of subdivision (b), and shall also specify the factual findings used to determine that the provision of reunification services to the offending parent or guardian would not benefit the child.

Approved _____, 1996

Governor

